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FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6471
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 1586
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 1405
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC PRIORITY 0848
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1257

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 001198

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STATE FOR WHA/EX AND WHA/CAR
S/CRS
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR
INR/IAA
WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: OAS TO REOPEN VOTER REGISTRATION

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 1134

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¶1. (U) Summary: The Organization of American States (OAS) is working with the Ministry of Justice's national identity office (ONI) to reopen voter registration inside existing civil registry offices. The OAS, though short of funding, plans to begin registration in August but does not expect a large number of new voters. The provisional electoral council (CEP), however, has exhibited some resistance to relinquishing authority over voter registration to ONI. The OAS cited the need to trim the number of employees and keep election costs down, but would like to continue working with some electoral staff to institutionalize electoral procedures. End summary.

Voter Registration and Civil Registry

¶2. (U) OAS technical expert Felix Ortega on June 27 told poloffs that the OAS and the national identity office (ONI) will begin opening 150 regional voter registration offices during the first week of August. (Note: Voter registration has been closed since October 2005. End note.) The GoH decided that after the elections cycle, ONI would manage all voter registration. ONI has existed as a division of the Ministry of Justice since fall 2005, but only has about 10 employees. ONI will now convert the 182 civil registry offices, with a total of 600 employees, into combination voter registration/civil registry centers. Ortega reported that the provisional electoral council (CEP) members resisted the authority transfer to the point where Prime Minister Alexis and Minister of Justice Rene Magloire sent an official letter to the CEP informing them that they will no longer be in charge of voter registration.

¶3. (U) Ortega estimated that between 500,000 and 700,000 new voters will register in the first two months of operation, mostly people who have turned 18 since registration closed in ¶2005. The OAS is preparing the system for an intake of one million people over the initial two-month time span, but capacity can easily be increased, according to Ortega. He said that CEP president Max Mathurin's estimate of two million new registered voters is excessive, because most people who wanted to register did so during the previous

registration period. Ortega estimated that the OAS needs USD 17 million over two years to support the voter registration and civil registry project. To date, they have USD 3 million pledged by Canada.

Electoral Council and Staff

¶4. (U) The OAS's main priority now is working with mid-level civil servants at the CEP, according to Ortega. These employees are the stable core of the institution, whereas the council members are term-limited. Ortega would like to train the mid-level employees so that the CEP functions efficiently regardless of the council members, but stated that the GoH needs to provide job security so that each new council does not try to replace all existing civil servants. Working with the mid-level employees would also allow the OAS to begin preparations for the Senate elections before the creation of a permanent CEP, including set up of the tabulation center, political party registration and ballot preparation.

Elections Budget

¶5. (U) Ortega noted that over the next five years, Haiti is due to hold 11 elections at a cost of USD 185 million. To economize, the CEP needs to downsize its headquarters as well as regional offices. The communal electoral offices (French acronym BEC) have 600 employees with little or no tasks between elections, and so should only be hired on a temporary basis during election cycles. Additionally, ONI will not need all 2500 employees hired by the CEP to operate registration centers. Ortega estimated ONI only needs 500 regional workers.

¶6. (U) Comment: Working with the CEP staff is essential to
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the future of the institution and Haitian elections in general. While the council is necessary for making final decisions on challenges to the elections results, it does not carry responsibility for the logistical process of elections.

The OAS is also correct that the elections staff is unnecessarily large, but as with other GoH entities, firing state employees is a controversial undertaking.

SANDERSON